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Security Council

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Monday, 5 February 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 1 February 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/84)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): As this is the first public meeting of the Security Council for the month of February, I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan, for his service as President of the Council for the month of January. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Umarov and his team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 1 February 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/84)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/84, which contains the text of a letter dated 1 February 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Ms. Nakamitsu.

Ms. Nakamitsu: I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council once again on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical-weapons programme.

I remain in regular contact with the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to discuss matters related to this issue; I spoke to him last week. In addition, I met with the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations this past Friday.

At the time of my previous briefing, planning was under way with regard to the destruction of the remaining two stationary above-ground facilities of the 27 declared by the Syrian Arab Republic. I am informed that the OPCW, working with the United Nations Office for Project Services, is currently at the stage of finalizing a contract with a private company to carry out the destruction, which I understand could be completed within two months.

There have been some developments on the issues related to Syria's initial declaration and subsequent amendments. The translation and analysis of documents that were provided to the OPCW by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in November have been completed. The OPCW has indicated that this information provided clarifications on some issues. However, the OPCW is continuing to follow up with the Government of Syria on the remaining gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies. The Director-General will submit a report in that regard to the next session of the OPCW Executive Council, which will take place in March.

Further to its routine inspections in Syria, samples taken by the OPCW team during its second inspection at the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre are currently being analysed by two OPCW-designated laboratories. The Executive Council will be informed of the results of the inspection via a separate note from the Director-General to the next session of the Executive Council.

The OPCW Fact-finding Mission continues to look into all allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the majority of which involve the use of toxic chemicals, such a chlorine, in areas not under the control of the Government. The Fact-finding Mission expects to submit a report on the allegations very soon. In addition, another Fact-finding Mission team has been looking into allegations of the use of chemical weapons brought to the attention of the OPCW by the Government of Syria. At the time of our previous briefing, a Fact-finding Mission team was in Damascus, at the invitation of the Government, to look into several of those allegations. I am informed that a report in that regard is also pending.

There is still work to do before resolution 2118 (2013) can be considered to have been fully implemented, and for the international community to have shared confidence that the chemical-weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic has been fully eliminated. Moreover, allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria have continued, including just this past weekend in the town of Saraqeb. That makes abundantly clear our continuing and collective responsibility to ensure that those responsible are held to account.

New reports by the Fact-finding Mission are pending. Should they conclude that there has been the use, or likely use, of chemical weapons in any of those alleged incidents, our obligation to enact a meaningful response will be further intensified. It is my hope, and the hope of the Secretary-General, that such a response will favour unity, not impunity. As always, the Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to provide whatever support and assistance it can.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Ms. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): The news out of Syria this morning is following a troubling pattern. There are reports of yet another chemical-weapon attack on Sunday. Victims of what appears to be chlorine gas are pouring into hospitals. Few things have horrified my country and the world as much as the Al-Assad regime's use of chemical weapons against its people. The Security Council has been outspoken on ending Syria's use of chemical weapons, and yet they continue.

Under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013), the Al-Assad regime's obligations are clear: it must immediately stop using all chemical weapons. It must address the gaps and inconsistencies in its Chemical Weapons Convention declaration. And it must destroy all of its remaining chemical weapons under the supervision of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). These are worthy goals. These are urgent goals. Yet we spent much of last year in the Council watching one country protect the Al-Assad regime's use of chemical weapons by refusing to hold them responsible.

What do the American people see? What do people of all countries see? They see a Council that cannot agree to take action, even after the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, created by the Council, found that the Al-Assad regime used chemical weapons. Now we have reports that the Al-Assad regime has used chlorine gas against its people multiple times in recent weeks, including just yesterday. There is obvious evidence from dozens of victims, and therefore we proposed a draft press statement by the Security Council condemning these attacks. So far, Russia has delayed the adoption of the draft statement — a simple condemnation of Syrian children being suffocated by chlorine gas. I hope Russia takes the appropriate step to adopt the draft text, thus showing that the Council is unified in condemning chemical-weapon attacks.

Accountability is a fundamental principle, but it is just the first step. Our goal must be to end the use of these evil, unjustifiable weapons. When actions have consequences — when perpetrators are identified and punished — we come closer to reaching our goal. But if we cannot even take the first step of establishing accountability for the use of chemical weapons, we have to seriously ask ourselves why we are here. The requirements for establishing accountability for the use of chemical weapons have not changed since the Council voted unanimously to create the Joint Investigative Mechanism, in 2015. They have not changed since Russia acted alone to kill the Mechanism last year. Such a mechanism must be independent and impartial. It must be free of politics. It must be controlled by experts, not politicians or diplomats. And it must be definitive.

The latest Russian draft resolution does not meet any of those criteria. Russia's draft resolution completely ignores the findings of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, which was an investigation that Russia supported until the investigators found the Al-Assad regime to be responsible. That should already be enough to make us sceptical. However, there are other deep problems. For their new investigation, Russia wants to be able to cherry-pick the investigators. It wants to insert unnecessary and arbitrary investigative standards. And it wants the Security Council to be able to review all the findings of this investigation and decide what makes it into the final report. That is not an impartial mechanism; it is a way to whitewash the findings of the last investigation that Russia desperately wants to bury. No one should believe that the draft resolution is a good basis for discussion, when it is designed to undermine our core principles on chemical weapons. We cannot

hope to end the use of chemical weapons if those who use them escape the consequences of their actions.

Therefore, while we regret the need for its creation, we applaud the efforts of France to launch the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons. That is yet another way to hold accountable the Al-Assad regime and any group that uses chemical weapons. The United States has also announced that we will contribute to the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. The United States strongly supports the Mechanism as a valuable tool to hold the Al-Assad regime accountable for its atrocities, including its repeated and ongoing use of chemical weapons.

It is a true tragedy that Russia has sent us back to square one in the effort to end the use of chemical weapons in Syria. But we will not cease in our efforts to know the truth of the Al-Assad regime — and ensure that the truth is known and acted on by the international community. That is why we hosted all 15 members of the Council at the United States Holocaust Museum last week. The exhibit was called "Syria: Please Don't Forget Us". All of us saw undeniable evidence of the Al-Assad regime's atrocities and human rights violations. We cannot, and should not, forget the Syrian people. The United States will not forget them. While the Council has not yet been able to act to provide real accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the United States will not give up on the responsibility to do so. That is the sincere wish of the American people, and I know that it is shared by many on the Council. We are not motivated by score-settling, payback or power politics. We are motivated by the urgent need to end the unique and horrible suffering that chemical weapons have inflicted on innocent men, women and children in Syria. The Syrian people are counting on us.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I would like to thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

We are holding this meeting in the open Chamber today after reports of a series of chemical attacks in eastern Ghouta within the past month, as the Al-Assad regime continues its merciless bombing and killing of civilians. Over the weekend, there were further allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Idlib, as well as air strikes by pro-regime forces that reportedly hit three hospitals, leaving doctors scrambling to remove premature babies from their incubators in order to move them. I cannot say that they were moving them to safety, because the reality is that for the citizens of Idlib and eastern Ghouta, nowhere is safe.

We are appalled by this violence and the reports of deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, and we call on all parties to the conflict to uphold international humanitarian law and protect civilians. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is already investigating reports of the use of chemical weapons in recent weeks, but establishing who is responsible for that use will be much more difficult, because Russia has vetoed the continuation of the independent, expert OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) three times, in order to protect the Al-Assad regime. We would welcome any serious attempt to re-establish a properly independent investigative and attribution mechanism for continuing the JIM's meticulous work. Sadly, we do not yet see that in the Russian proposal. Any successor investigation must be empowered to investigate all use of chemical weapons, whoever the perpetrator may be. Yet the Russian proposal focuses only on non-State actors. We have repeatedly condemned Da'esh for its use of chemical weapons, which the JIM clearly reported. But given Al-Assad's track record of chemical-weapon use and its failure to comply with the Chemical Weapons Convention, it is imperative to ensure that any new mechanism also investigates the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime.

A second objection is the proposal that experts would merely gather evidence, leaving the Council to decide what it meant. No other United Nations expert panel that I know of is specifically prohibited from reaching conclusions and reporting to the Council on its findings on what has happened. We are not specialists on chemical weapons around this table. We rely on independent, United Nations-selected expert panels. The entire purpose of the JIM was that an independent panel would reach conclusions on the basis of the evidence, taking the issue out of the hands of us, the Member States and Council members, because we have been unable to agree. Russia's proposal looks as if it is designed to avoid the political embarrassment of having to use its veto power to defend the indefensible when independent bodies report on what has truly happened. The underlying intent seems to be to ensure that there are no clear conclusions in future reports.

Thirdly, we object to the proposal's demands that the standard of proof should be beyond reasonable doubt. That standard has not been used in any other comparable past or current United Nations investigation. It is used in relation to criminal prosecutions in courts of law, which have significantly greater investigative powers and independence than those envisaged in Russia's text.

Finally, the proposal insists on site visits, despite the explicit provision in the Chemical Weapons Convention for other ways to gather relevant evidence, recognizing the difficulty of safe and timely visits. There is no scientific basis for this proposal. It is simply an attempt to hamstring future investigations and discredit the JIM. Of course, Russia made much of the lack of a site visit to Khan Shaykhun, despite the fact that the Al-Assad regime handed over to the United Nations samples from the site that contained chemical signatures unique to regime sarin, obviating the need for such a visit. It is for those reasons that the current text is unacceptable. The JIM set a high standard of impartiality and expertise. We expect that standard from any future mechanism.

The Syrian regime, of course, claims not to have used chemical weapons. Yet over the years two separate reports from the JIM, under separate leadership panels, drawing on a broad range of respected independent international experts, concluded that the regime had used chlorine at least three times — in Talmenes in April 2014 and in Sarmin and Qmenas in March 2015 — and had used sarin to attack Khan Shaykhun in April 2017. We should also remember the infamous attack in eastern Ghouta in August 2013, when a separate United Nations investigation found that sarin was used to kill hundreds and injure thousands. That attack brought near-universal international condemnation, and following our concerted international pressure, Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention. Syria promised, as it was legally obliged to do, to destroy and abandon its chemical-weapon programme. Yet it has been unable to satisfy inspectors that it has done so. We have to ask ourselves why that is. In 2013 Russia promised to act as a guarantor for the Al-Assad regime's compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. Yet month after month we all sit here and hear that Al-Assad has not done so. Why does Russia not compel the Syrian regime to comply with its obligations and make it impossible for it to use chemical weapons?

Tragically, for the people of Syria, the regime continues to use chemical weapons with impunity. If it is confirmed that Al-Assad has again used chemical weapons on his own people, it would not only be another entry in the catalogue of his war crimes, it would also be another attack on us all. Members of the United Nations who have worked for decades — in the words of the Chemical Weapons Convention, for the sake of all mankind — to completely exclude the possibility of the use of chemical weapons. Throughout history, our peoples have said "never again" — among others, starting with the First World War battlefields, in Ethiopia, in Manchuria and in Saddam Hussein's attacks on Iran and on Iraqi Kurds. Let us, the members of the Council, stand up for the peoples of the United Nations, determined that such abhorrent chemical weapons should never be used. Let us stand up for the people of Syria and give them a real investigation into those responsible for the use of chemical weapons — an investigation that pursues justice for the horrific crimes committed against them. Let us signal our determination to pursue accountability by all means available, even if one member of the Security Council is currently preventing us from taking action here.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to congratulate Kuwait through you, Mr. President, on the start of its presidency of the Security Council. You can rely on France's support in the month to come. I would also like to thank Izumi Nakamitsu for her usual very informative briefing.

This is the second time we have met in less than two weeks after reports of four new cases of the use of chlorine against Syria's civilian population, some of them in Idlib province, which is a de-escalation zone. We are examining the information that is available and waiting for the conclusions of the investigative mechanism, but the reality is that resorting to toxic substances as weapons has never ended in Syria. I would like to remind the Council that the Syrian regime has already been identified as the perpetrator in four such cases, one of which involved the use of sarin, in violation of international humanitarian law and the obligations that Syria assumed when it acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The challenges go beyond the Syrian issue. A century after the end of the First World War, in which mustard gas was used on a massive scale against civilians, what we are seeing is shocking. These weapons, which we had thought were a thing of the past, are once again being used methodically and systematically by the Syrian regime against its own people. Furthermore, there is a real threat of such

weapons falling into the hands of terrorists. The threat is all the greater given the fact that the dismantling of the Syrian chemical-weapon programme remains at a deadlock. The cooperation of the Syrian regime with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has for months taken place in a piecemeal manner, and suspicions remain about the status of Syrian stockpiles.

I would recall that OPCW expert teams have repeatedly found at Syrian sites indicators of undeclared substances, without any convincing explanation being provided by the country. Given that chemical weapons continue to be used, it seems that Syria has lied and maintained clandestine capacities. The situation is aggravating regional instability, undermining the non-proliferation regime and weakening the international security architecture, as well as jeopardizing the security of each of our States. It represents a violation of the law and flouts the most fundamental principles of humanity.

The international community cannot downplay the situation and allow the perpetrators of these heinous crimes to remain unpunished. It is the responsibility of the Security Council to prevent this; it is our shared responsibility. The criminals who chose to design and use these barbaric weapons must be punished. At stake is the future of our collective security system; no one can be allowed to undermine its foundations without facing consequences.

The hindrances and obstructions facing the international community's initiatives within existing bodies contribute to promoting impunity, and this we cannot accept. For that reason, France launched in Paris an open, pragmatic partnership that brings together States that reject impunity for individuals involved in chemical-weapon attacks or in the development of chemical-weapon programmes. It brings together all the States concerned about the threat of erosion of the non-proliferation regime and of strategic stability. It was designed to support all international bodies and investigative mechanisms in their efforts. This universal partnership applies to all instances of the use of such weapons throughout the world by all perpetrators, be they State or non-State actors. The partnership is open, and States that embrace these principles are invited to join.

Like everyone else here, we hope that a mechanism for the identification of those responsible will be recreated as soon as possible. However, any sincere and credible effort to that end must align with the basic standards of independence, impartiality and professionalism that underpinned the Joint Investigative Mechanism, as the very reason for the establishment of such a regime is to determine the truth. Within the Council, France will be very vigilant with respect to the principles listed and will not accept a lesser mechanism.

Impunity in Syria is not an option. The perpetrators of all of the crimes committed in Syria will be held accountable, sooner or later. The International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria, which we support, is a part of that process. That is the only way to ensure lasting peace in Syria, and this can come about only in the framework of an inclusive political solution in Geneva, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), which more than ever before represents our shared compass.

The repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria has been proved. We cannot turn a blind eye to this, for no one can now say that they did not know. Denial or hypocrisy, or a combination of of the two, cannot be presented as a strategy. The persistent use of chemical weapons in Syria represents a violation of the universal conscience as well as the most fundamental principles of international law. It also poses a potentially lethal threat to the sustainability of the international non-proliferation regime, which is the most comprehensive and successful of all of the international non-proliferation regimes. To allow it to be undermined without any response would be to accept the erosion of the entire international regime for the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction that we have built together, stone by stone, over the course of decades and which constitutes the very backbone of the international security architecture as well as one of the paramount gains of multilateralism.

On behalf of France, I call on all members of the Security Council to shift their attitudes and adjust their focus. The heavy responsibility that we all bear requires that we join together and take action.

Mr. Llorenty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation wishes to congratulate you once again, Sir, as well as the Permanent Mission of Kuwait, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. We are also grateful for the briefing provided by the Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu. We also

wish to acknowledge the letter sent by the Secretary-General (S/2018/84) concerning the periodic report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Bolivia believes that there can be no justification for the use of chemical weapons, regardless of circumstances and by whomsoever committed, as such use is a serious violation of international law and poses a grave threat to international peace and security. We therefore categorically condemn the use of chemical weapons or substances as weapons, as we deem this an unjustifiable and criminal act, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed.

In that context, we express our grave concern about the ongoing reports of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, especially in eastern Ghouta. If that is confirmed, the Council should remain united in order to ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable and brought to justice, so that there is no impunity for their actions.

We commend the coordination between the OPCW and the United Nations Office for Project Services in all of the arrangements aimed at making possible the destruction of the two remaining facilities as well as the preparedness of the Syrian Government to achieve this end. We call on the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to cooperate with the OPCW on this initiative, as well as during the second inspection of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre.

We encourage the Fact-finding Mission to continue its investigation so that, in accordance with its mandate, it can investigate, in the most objective, methodical and technical manner, reports of the use of chemicals weapons on Syrian territory. In that regard, we highlight the latest visit to the city of Damascus during January, and we will await the results thereof.

We call on all parties involved to cooperate fully as well as to provide viable and reliable information, so that an effective investigation of all of the ongoing cases can be conducted as soon as possible.

Concerned about the reports of the use of chemical weapons, we deem it essential to establish as soon as possible an independent, impartial and representative mechanism to carry out a full, reliable and conclusive investigation of the cases referred by the Fact-finding Mission that will make it possible to identify those responsible for such acts. Nevertheless, if we want to create a new, transparent accountability mechanism, we have the major challenge and the responsibility of not instrumentalizing the Security Council for political ends.

In that vein, we view the Russian proposal as a new and positive opportunity to reach this goal. We therefore call on the members of the Council to commit themselves to a process of purposeful negotiation, and we echo the words of the Secretary-General in his letter transmitting the current report, calling on the Security Council to demonstrate unity on this issue, which is so vital for the international community.

Finally, we reiterate that the only option for resolving the conflict in Syria and prevent more people from becoming victims is through an inclusive political transition led by and benefiting the Syrian people that respects their sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): Since this is the first public meeting of the Security Council for the month of February, I would like to congratulate the delegation of Kuwait on the commencement of its presidency and wish it great success in implementing its ambitious programme of work. I am grateful to High Representative Nakamitsu for her informative briefing.

Our position on this issue remains unchanged. We strongly condemn any use of chemical weapons and advocate that such threats must be eliminated in the future. We firmly believe that there must be accountability for perpetrators of such crimes. Today I would like to concentrate on three major points.

First, we support the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), as reflected in its fifty-second report (S/2018/84, annex). The speedy destruction, probably in two months, of the remaining chemical-weapon production facilities and resolving all outstanding issues relating to the declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic are of the utmost importance. That would help to dispel all existing doubts on many principal issues and to comprehend the real situation in the country. It is commendable that, during the inspection of Barzah and Jamrayah, all samples were sealed, packaged and shipped to OPCW's laboratory and were received there in the presence of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, observing all established rules. We look forward to the follow-up to the OPCW's work, and we will also await the results

of a thorough analysis of the documents submitted by Syria by the Declaration Assessment Team.

Secondly, the continuing reports on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria are extremely alarming. But the most alarming fact is that the Council has not yet restored its investigative potential to properly respond to such cases. I recall the words of the Secretary-General, who pointed to the serious gap that had arisen at the end of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, which leaves one with the feeling that impunity will continue without any strict monitoring.

Thirdly, and lastly, considering the current developments, it is also most critical that a new mechanism be established as soon as possible. We here in the Council are not experts on chemical weapons — neither to judge or blame anyone — but must act on the basis of credible evidence provided to us by an independent, impartial and representative investigative body we can all trust. In that regard, we support the ongoing consultations on creating a new investigative instrument, in order to prevent any further use of chemical weapons and to bring perpetrators to justice. We are ready to participate actively and contribute to the earliest revival and ultimate realization of our investigative potential.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We join others in congratulating your delegation, Sir, on having assumed the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. We support you in discharging your tasks, which we are sure you will do in full. We welcome the holding of this meeting and thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu for her valuable briefing on this topic.

Peru condemns the use of chemical weapons by any actor, in any place and under any circumstance. Their use against the civilian population in Syria is a war crime and a flagrant violation of international law, international humanitarian law and the non-proliferation regimes. In that regard, Peru believes it is essential for the international community, and in particular the Security Council, to remain resolute and united in its support for the non-proliferation regime and in ensuring that those responsible for these atrocious crimes — which are also threats to international peace and security — be held accountable. We must continue to demand that the Syrian Government fulfil its commitment to cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in the elimination of all of its chemical weapons.

We take note of some recent progress, such as the imminent destruction of the last two declared chemical-weapon production facilities, as verified preliminarily by the OPCW last November, and the allocation of new financial resources to that end. Nevertheless, we are concerned that key points of the Syrian Government's declaration have yet to be verified, more than four years after its accession to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction. We hope that the 19 recently translated documents that were provided to the OPCW will help rectify errors and omissions and clear up discrepancies. We reaffirm our commitment and support to the OPCW, whose Executive Council Peru is honoured to be a member of.

In the face of new reports of chemical-weapon attacks in eastern Ghouta and Idlib, Peru expresses its solidarity with the victims and reiterates the urgent need to identify and bring to justice the perpetrators of such atrocities. Like a majority of Council members, we believe that accountability is essential to safeguarding the international non-proliferation regimes. Preventing this threat requires a credible deterrent. With that goal in mind, we believe it is urgent to establish an attributive mechanism with the highest standards of professionalism, objectivity, transparency and, primarily, independence in order to fill the gap left by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. My delegation will continue to work constructively to create a new mechanism that addresses the legitimate concerns of all Council members and of the international community.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I also want to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. I also thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing today.

In recent weeks there have been new, alarming reports of alleged chemical-weapon attacks in Syria. The most recent allegation was this weekend in Idlib. These reported attacks must be immediately investigated by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission, to which we offer our full and unreserved support.

We reiterate our strongest condemnation of the use of chemical weapons. It is a serious violation

of international law and it constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Their use in armed conflict amounts to a war crime. Perpetrators of such crimes must be held accountable. We cannot accept impunity.

That is why Sweden joined the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, initiated by France. As a member of the Security Council and of the OPCW Executive Council, we support all international efforts to combat the use and proliferation of chemical weapons by State and non-State actors alike anywhere in the world. We count on this initiative to complement and support our collective work in multilateral forums, as well as the existing multilateral mechanisms to achieve unity around those important goals. That also includes the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, both of which have important mandates in collecting information.

I again thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing today. She reminded us that work remains on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). The outstanding issues relating to Syria's initial declaration must be resolved without further delay. We again call upon the Syrian authorities to fully cooperate with the OPCW in that regard.

As the Secretary-General has stated, the continuing allegations highlight yet again our shared obligation to identify and hold to account those responsible for the use chemical weapons on Syria. We need to heed his call, come together and act. That is why Sweden has engaged in the negotiations on establishing a new independent and impartial attributive mechanism. The Council has a responsibility to protect the international disarmament and non-proliferation regimes and for ensuring accountability. Negotiations need to be in good faith, but with the objective of establishing a truly independent, impartial and effective mechanism for accountability.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to take this opportunity to wish the delegation of Kuwait every success in implementing the programme of work for this month.

(*spoke in English*)

Let me thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her informative briefing. We appreciate the ongoing work of the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Fact-finding Mission. We welcome the cooperation between the secretariat and the United Nations Office for Project Services, which facilitated the destruction of the two remaining chemical-weapon production facilities. We look forward to the results of the analysis by the Declaration Assessment Team of a set of documents and declarations submitted by Syria.

Chemical weapons continue to pose a threat to the people of Syria. Repeated allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, including the recent ones, serve to underline the fact that there is still a challenge to international peace and security, as well as to the credibility of the Chemical Weapons Convention regime. In that context, there is a genuine need for a clear message that impunity for perpetrators is not an option.

We have clearly stated in various forums that the use of chemical weapons by anyone — State and non-State actors alike — anywhere and under any circumstances must be rigorously condemned and those responsible for such acts must be held accountable. We agree that the Security Council needs to take steps in order to establish a credible, professional and independent investigative mechanism. We have therefore engaged in the discussions to find the best solution for the future mechanism. I would like to focus on three points.

First, Poland has supported the work of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) and continues to support the establishment of an independent and credible investigative mechanism aimed at holding accountable the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. However, a future mechanism will not operate in a void. The instrument must build on the Joint Investigative Mechanism. Not only should it build on the significant achievements of the JIM, but its mandate must not deviate from resolution 2235 (2015).

Secondly, the mandate of the mechanism should be balanced. There is a need to identify not only the individuals, entities and groups but also the Governments responsible for any use of chemicals as weapons.

Thirdly, one of the most important elements of the mandate must be to ensure that the mechanism is independent in its proceedings and conclusions and

free from the pressure of political verification of its conclusions by the Council.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me once again to congratulate you, Mr. President, and the State of Kuwait on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. I wish you every success and assure you of our full support. Allow me also to express my congratulations and appreciation to Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and her team for the presentation of the comprehensive and detailed briefing on the current political and humanitarian situation with regard to chemical weapons in Syria.

The political — and in particular the humanitarian — crisis in Syria is reaching alarming proportions. The Republic of Equatorial Guinea expresses its solidarity with the families of the countless victims, as well as with the thousands of displaced people trapped by the hostilities and the more than 13 million people who currently need humanitarian assistance as a result of the continuing conflict.

I would like to take this opportunity to condemn the loss of numerous civilian lives in this conflict, and I call on all parties to comply with international law on the protection of civilians and to distinguish between military and civilian objectives and refrain from firing rocket launchers into populated areas, as is being reported in eastern Ghouta.

Equatorial Guinea can only express its satisfaction at the destruction of almost all the chemical-weapon production facilities declared by the Syrian Arab Republic thanks to the technical assistance of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). However, while we welcome the cooperation between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the OPCW, it is necessary to be vigilant and to continue to condemn in the strongest terms any possible use, development, acquisition or manufacture of chemical weapons in the country or transfers of such weapons to other States or non-State actors. In that regard, we vigorously condemn the recent use of toxic chemical weapons by whomsoever. The perpetrators of such horrendous acts must be brought to justice and sentenced appropriately.

For seven years already, Syria has been a war scenario that crystallizes internal, regional and, even, international divisions. The primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security bestowed upon the Security Council by the Charter of the United Nations should lead the 15 member countries of this principal organ of the United Nations to overcome their differences regarding the situation in Syria and to renounce their political and strategic interests in favour of the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people to achieve well-being and prosperity.

In that regard, it is appropriate that, as Russia has already proposed, another mechanism be established to replace the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism so that it can carry out the necessary investigations on the use of chemical weapons in Syria and thereby arrive at a result that garners consensus among the members of the Council in order to again unify our criteria for an objective examination of the situation.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, at the beginning of your presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. I wish you every success. We also thank Ms. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

We trust that, with the assistance of the United Nations Office for Project Services and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the two remaining above-ground Syrian chemical-weapon facilities will be promptly destroyed. The Syrian side has repeatedly demonstrated its interest in that. The pending issues related to the initial declarations should be dealt with as part of the dialogue between the OPCW and the Syrian Government. We welcome such cooperation, by which Syria, as a conscientious party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, provides the necessary assistance, complies with its obligations and facilitates access to the relevant documents.

Many people have raised false issues that should now be closed and put aside. Syria's chemical-weapon capacity was destroyed under the oversight of the OPCW. However, it seems that there are some who wish to contrive to fan the flames on the issue. The Syrians have provided exhaustive explanations. However, issues are being raised and questions are being asked in a endless cycle. The Syrian side consistently reports to the international community, including the Security Council, about the detection of toxic chemical substances in areas liberated from the terrorists. There

are reports from Syria about possible provocations that may be used by representatives of foreign intelligence services. All such reports must be investigated immediately by the experts of the OPCW.

However, we note that, in general, tremendous efforts are necessary for The Hague to duly respond to the important message. There are numerous pretexts being put forward not to travel there and decisions are being delayed. In the light of last year's story of Khan Shaykhun and the Shayrat air base, such conduct suggests deliberate sabotage.

However, the statements today have left us with the impression that it is not Syria that some delegations are interested in. The United States and the United Kingdom have used today's meeting to slander Russia, and it is quite clear why that is happening. Someone cannot tolerate the success of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi and the prospects it offers for injecting new momentum into the political process in Syria. That requires launching a major campaign of slander against Russia in order to try, not for the first time, to cast doubt on Russia's role in the Syrian political settlement. As always, the statements of these representatives contain a grain of truth mixed with mountains of lies. Russia has never contested the use of sarin in Khan Shaykhun. But who it was used by is still a mystery, because the absurd conclusions of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) have not convinced us.

In the past few days there has been general uproar about alleged incidents involving the use of chlorine in some Damascus suburbs. There has already been talk of the use of sarin. Where? When? By whom? The outlines of this propaganda campaign are not new. The terrorists, through the social associations that are closely linked to them, foremost among them the notorious White Helmets, spread rumours via social networks. These are instantly picked up by the Western press, and then we get representatives speechifying in the Security Council, making unproved accusations about the so-called Syrian regime and spreading slander about Russia. I have said it before and I will say it again: has anyone thought to ask the basic question as to why the Syrian Government needs to use chemical weapons? What do we suppose that could do for it?

The first thing we should do, and various speakers today, particularly the representative of Sweden, have discussed this, is to send an OPCW fact-finding mission to those areas to investigate. Where is the presumption of innocence? The speakers are blaming the so-called regime for everything in advance, before any investigation. What do they want an independent investigative mechanism for? Surely at least they know that an investigation has to precede any conclusions. But apparently they do not need one. In my opinion, it should be completely clear to everyone that that the capitals that these representatives represent in the Council have absolutely no interest in any investigation. They do not need facts or precise evidence. They need to see a political order carried out.

On 23 January, Russia announced the launch in the Security Council of expert efforts to draft a resolution establishing a new investigative entity for incidents involving the use of chemical weapons to replace the defunct OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, which was killed by the United States and its allies when they blocked the draft resolution (S/2017/968) that we proposed, together with China and Bolivia, designed to ensure that the Mechanism could be genuinely independent and professional. Not only do they not recall that episode, they have made strenuous attempts to convince the Security Council and the world community of the opposite. It has become clear that some of our partners are not prepared to consider this possibility. They want a second JIM that would continue to rubber-stamp the scientifically and technically ridiculous anti-Damascus conclusions on the basis of disinformation generously supplied by militant groups. They have long had a persistent allergy to the pressing need to pay close attention to the activities of terrorist groups, both in Syria and beyond its borders, in the context of manipulating toxic substances.

In the realization that we will not allow the now entirely discredited JIM to be revived, Syria's opponents are now attempting to take alternative routes, cobbling together narrow groups of like-minded people. However, they are forgetting that in doing that they are undermining the authority of international bodies, particularly the United Nations and the OPCW, and destroying the international architecture on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Any initiatives in the context of the use of chemical weapons that circumvent the OPCW would be illegitimate. We certainly hope that the leadership of the United Nations Secretariat and the OPCW Technical Secretariat will make a firm show of will and distance themselves from such dubious projects.

We are ready to accept a press statement on the Syrian chemical issue, but not the one proposed by its sponsors, because in its current form its purpose is quite clearly to blame the Government of Syria for what is so far the unproved use of chemical weapons. Somehow the draft statement does not say anything about the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, but the reference to Article 7 of the Charter of the United Nations leaves no doubt as to its essence. We cannot accept any still unconfirmed references to the use of chemical weapons without a credible investigation, nor can we accept any threats to a sovereign State for unproved actions. For some reason, eastern Ghouta has been dragged into the statement. I would like to remind the Council that last week we were prepared to accept an agreed-on draft presidential statement on the humanitarian situation in Syria. But our partners preferred to reject it. We are ready to accept a press statement, but not as it is proposed by our colleagues. We have proposed amendments to it that we are ready to circulate and agree on in that form.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I would like to congratulate Kuwait through you, Mr. President, on its accession to the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February, to wish it every success and assure it of Côte d'Ivoire's cooperation. I would also like to thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her excellent briefing.

My delegation commends the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons through its Fact-finding Mission with regard to the dismantling of Syria's chemical-weapon stocks. We encourage the Syrian Government to comply with decisions regarding the destruction of its chemical arsenal.

My delegation is seriously concerned about the reports in the past week once again alleging the possible use of chemical weapons in the conflict in Syria, particularly in eastern Ghouta, where 21 cases of suffocation have been reported. They represent a significant reversal in our efforts to combat impunity with regard to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The suffering inflicted on the Syrian people is intolerable and must be ended. In that regard, my country calls for continued efforts to implement resolution 2118 (2013), which provides for the complete dismantling of the Syrian chemical-weapons arsenal.

These new allegations of the use of chemical weapons once again call into question the Council's responsibility, particularly in terms of putting an end to these acts as soon as possible and of clearly identifying the perpetrators of such criminal acts. In its latest statement on the issue of chemical weapons in Syria (see S/PV.8164), my delegation warned against the Council's failure to act, which could be interpreted by those involved in the use of such weapons in Syria as a weakness of this organ and licence to act with impunity. Clearly, those who commit these despicable acts will continue to do so as long as the Council remains divided about the need to set up a consensus-based framework capable of identifying perpetrators and bringing them to justice. My delegation therefore encourages all ongoing initiatives that support the establishment of an accountability mechanism acceptable to all.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its strong condemnation of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and calls upon the relevant United Nations mechanisms to shed light on the new allegations of the use of such weapons. My delegation eagerly awaits the conclusions of the report that will be submitted after the second round of inspections conducted at the Scientific Studies and Research Centre in Syria.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China congratulates Kuwait on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the current month. We also commend Kazakhstan for its accomplishments during its presidency last month. I wish to thank the High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

China welcomes the progress achieved in the verification and destruction of the two remaining chemical-weapon facilities within Syria's borders. We support the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in continuing its coordination and cooperation with the Syrian Government so as to properly settle all the questions revolving around the initial declarations of chemical weapons by Syria through the OPCW platform.

China expresses its deepest sympathy to the Syrian people for their suffering as the result of chemical weapons. No use of chemical weapons will be tolerated. Lately, there have been some media reports of suspected use of chlorine and other poisonous chemicals as weapons within Syria's borders, over which China wishes to register its deepest concern. It is hoped that

the parties will carry out verification of the related incidents as soon as possible.

When it comes to the question of chemical weapons, China's position is as clear cut as it is consistent. We stand firmly against the use of chemical weapons by any country, organization or individual for whatever purpose and under any circumstances. China supports conducting comprehensive, objective and impartial investigations into any alleged use of chemical weapons within Syrian borders so as to come up with results that withstand the test of time, square with the facts and help bring the perpetrators to justice.

Establishing a new chemical-weapon investigative mechanism is critical to getting to the bottom of the chemical-weapon incidents as well as warding off any future recurrences in Syria. All Council parties should work together to that end. China supports the efforts on the part of Russia to promote the establishment of a new investigative mechanism into the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We hope that the members of the Council will continue to engage in constructive consultations so as to achieve consensus at an early date.

The chemical-weapon issue in Syria is closely related to a political settlement to the Syrian situation. Major achievements have been made at the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held recently in Sochi, which played a positive role in advancing the Syrian political process, while lending impetus to relaunching the Geneva talks. It is China's hope that relevant parties will support the Security Council and the OPCW in continuing to act as the main channel for tackling the Syrian chemical-weapon issue, adopt a constructive attitude, seek proper solutions through consultation, maintain the unity of the Council and work with the United Nations and with the relevant parties in advancing the political process in Syria.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): As this is the first time that I take the floor under the Kuwaiti presidency of the Security Council, I would like to congratulate and honour Kuwait's assumption of the presidency by trying to offer my thanks in Arabic.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Thank you, Mr. President.

(*spoke in English*)

I would also like to thank Ms. Nakamitsu for her comprehensive and clear briefing.

I will address three issues today: first, reports of the renewed use of chemical weapons in Syria; secondly, the need for accountability; and, thirdly, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) report at hand (S/2018/84, annex).

With respect to the renewed use of chemical weapons in the past weeks, the Kingdom of the Netherlands is shocked at the recent reports of chemical attacks in Syria, including this weekend and last night. We are outraged. In Douma, in eastern Ghouta, and last night in Saraqeb, in Idlib, innocent civilians, including children, have become victims once again of horrible chemical-weapon attacks. Such attacks deserve the strongest condemnation of the Security Council as violations of international law. Furthermore, recent OPCW laboratory tests show that samples of the chemical attack on Ghouta in August 2013 correspond to the chemical-weapons arsenal declared by the Syrian regime in 2014 and the Khan Shaykun attack in 2017. This confirms once again that the Al-Assad regime uses chemical weapons against its own population. We pay tribute to the work of the White Helmets, who have saved more a 100,000 civilians from the rubble of the Syrian war.

The use of chemical weapons should never go unpunished. Impunity erodes the important prohibition against the use of chemical weapons. It is inconceivable that impunity now reigns, which brings me to my second point, namely, the need for accountability.

As others have said, we had a well-functioning and professional mechanism to ensure accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). The JIM repeatedly determined the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and by Da'esh. It had a strong mandate to investigate and identify perpetrators independently from the politics of the Security Council. And it did so accordingly, but the renewal of its mandate fell victim to the repeated use of the veto.

However, that does not mean that we now need to settle for less. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is prepared to work together on any proposal that strengthens accountability and the international rule of law. But let me emphasize that a weak accountability mechanism is not an option. For us, the fundamental characteristics of any accountability mechanism are the principles of impartiality, independence, comprehensiveness and effectiveness.

In order to uphold those principles, a mechanism should at least meet the following requirements. First, it should operate independently from the Security Council, including when it comes to the attribution of guilt. It should be impartial. The separation of powers is necessary to prevent undue politicization. Secondly, the mechanism should be effective; it should independently decide how it will conduct its investigations, including when it comes to analysing facts and assessing the quality of evidence. Lastly, it should be comprehensive and investigate and identify perpetrators among all parties to the armed conflict — both State and non-State actors. The draft resolution that is currently being discussed has not yet met those important principles.

That brings me to my third point, namely, the fifty-second OPCW report (S/2018/84, annex), which the High Representative presented very clearly in her briefing. The report points out that, unfortunately, too little progress has been made by the Syrian authorities in addressing the outstanding questions that the OPCW posed about the declaration of the Syrian authorities. It is essential that the Syrian authorities cooperate seriously with the OPCW. The Kingdom of the Netherlands supports the continuation of the work of OPCW Fact-finding Mission. We call on all States to ensure that the Fact-finding Mission can continue its work independently.

In conclusion, we stand ready to adopt the draft press statement, as circulated before. We are convinced that the Security Council cannot allow the continued use of chemical weapons to go unpunished. Impunity is a curse; accountability is a must. The Council has to act. As long as the Council is blocked from achieving accountability by the use of the veto, we will also continue our efforts outside the Council. We therefore strongly support other accountability initiatives for Syria, such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic and the Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. We also support the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, which was just highlighted by our French colleague. However, let me repeat what I have said in the Chamber before, the Council should refer the situation in Syria, especially the mass atrocities committed in the conflict, to the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We are very pleased to see you, Mr. President, assuming responsibility for the presidency. I wish to thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing, which, as always, we found to be balanced, and therefore useful. We are in need of that kind of approach. Frankly speaking, we need that very desperately. During times such as this, when we seem to be so deeply divided, the role of United Nations officials like her becomes all the more critical. We thank her.

We remain deeply concerned by the continued reports on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We strongly condemn the use of chemical weapons by any actor, State and non-State alike, in Syria or anywhere else. As we have stated repeatedly, the use of chemical weapons is totally unjustifiable under any circumstances. It constitutes a threat to international peace and security and undermines the international non-proliferation architecture. We cannot agree more with what the Secretary-General stated in the concluding paragraph of his letter of 1 February:

> "The fact of these continuing allegations again highlights the shared obligation to identify and hold to account those responsible for the use of chemical weapons."

That is why the unity of the Council is absolutely important. Without it, the Council's ability to respond to grave threats to international peace and security, such as the use of chemicals as weapons, will be seriously hampered. In that regard, what High Representative Nakamitsu said a while ago is most relevant: "unity, not impunity".

Let me say that we regret that the Council was not able to renew the mandate of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. If we are not able to address this institutional gap by drawing lessons from last year and forge the necessary unity and compromise, we will be sending the wrong message and encouraging impunity. The fact that chemical-weapon attacks have continued as recently as yesterday worries us very much. That is why it is so critical that we seek an independent way of establishing accountability.

We appreciate the initiative taken by the Russian Federation to propose a draft resolution on the establishment of a new mechanism, which has been the basis for discussion in recent days. This is a conversation that we welcome. As we continue to discuss this very important matter, our consultations should be constructive and forward-looking. Of course,

we are not naive; we have no illusions about how matters are becoming more and more complicated by the day. However, we still hope that the Council will restore its unity to reach common ground and create an independent, impartial and professional mechanism that will be able to identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria, based on robust evidence.

We welcome that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has continued to assist the Syrian Government in destroying the remaining stationary above-ground facilities. As the High Representative stated, we hope the facilities will be totally eliminated in the coming month. We have just heard a very encouraging statement from the High Representative.

We note that the OPCW has translated and finalized its analysis of the 19 documents submitted by the Syrian Government. While we look forward to the final report, we encourage continued cooperation and meaningful communication between the Syrian Government and the OPCW that leads to tangible results to address the outstanding issues. We also note that its Fact-finding Mission has continued its investigation related to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We look forward to its reports.

Let me conclude by again reiterating, at the risk of sounding naive, how the unity of the Council is vital to ensuring accountability and deterring and stopping the use of chemical weapons in Syria and elsewhere. We only hope that the challenge we face in this area is not a reflection of the growing lack of trust that characterizes international relations today, making joint action in most critical areas more complicated than it should be.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Kuwait.

At the outset, I would like to thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, for the briefing she gave at the beginning of this meeting.

We had hoped that the Security Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), in September 2013 following the first incident involving the use of chemical weapons in Syria, would have resolved this matter, since the Council had demonstrated unity and determination in confronting that crime with a view to ensuring that it not be repeated and that its perpetrators be held accountable. Consequently, we regret the substantial regression in addressing the chemical-weapon issue in Syria, which is a result of the divisions among Council members after the Council was unable to extend the mandate of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism in Syria, which we feel carried out its tasks in a very professional, impartial and independent manner.

We express our deep concern about the allegations of the continued use of chemical weapons in Syria, most recently during the attack in Douma, in eastern Ghouta, last week and during the attack that took place in Saraqeb, in Idlib, yesterday. This is the third such attack during the past few weeks, which means that the perpetrators of those crimes will go unpunished and that there is no guarantee that they, or anyone else, who commits such crimes in the future will be held accountable, after we lost the Joint Investigative Mechanism.

The position of the State of Kuwait is a principled and steadfast one that strongly condemns any use of chemical weapons, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever, as this is considered a grave violation of international law. We reiterate the need to hold accountable those responsible for such use, be they individuals, entities, non-State groups or Governments.

In that context, we condemn the use of heavy and destructive weapons as well as the targeting civilians and residential areas killing dozens of innocent victims. These weapons target health facilities and civilian locations in eastern Ghouta, Idlib and other areas. We therefore support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria in its quest to gather evidence and investigate the crimes committed against civilians in order to hold the perpetrators accountable.

The State of Kuwait will support any alternative or mechanism that enjoys the consensus of all members of the Security Council and ensures the independence, neutrality and professionalism of any new future mechanism. In that regard, we reaffirm that the primary responsibility of any mechanism must be to determine the identity of those using chemical weapons in Syria, provided that the Security Council would then play its role and hold the perpetrators accountable, in implementation of the principle of ending impunity and of resolution 2118 (2013), which undoubtedly stipulates the imperative need for, and importance of, holding accountable those responsible for the use of chemical

weapons in Syria. We also look forward to receiving the report that will soon be submitted by the Fact-finding Mission, as mentioned by Ms. Nakamitsu in her earlier briefing on the most recent incidents, as well as her reports on the use of chlorine gas in Saraqib.

In conclusion, we reiterate our full readiness to take part in any efforts that are aimed at reaching consensus among Security Council members and at holding accountable the perpetrators of such internationally prohibited crimes. We assert that a political solution in Syria is the only way to arrive at a comprehensive settlement of the crisis, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the United Kingdom has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I disagree with a lot of what my Russian colleague said, but I will not stretch my colleagues' patience. But I do feel compelled briefly to respond to several of the points that he made.

The first point is to say that this is not political for us. Preventing the use of these abhorrent weapons should transcend political disagreements. We do not oppose Russia's important role in Syria at all. We noted the outcomes of Sochi, and we look forward to the proposal for a constitutional committee returning to the next round of Geneva talks, with the full participation of Russia and the Syrian authorities, as was laid out in resolution 2254 (2015).

The second point I would simply make is that the notion that it was anyone other than Russia that ended the Joint Investigative Mechanism is absurd. The voting records of the Council are clear and are available to all. Russia vetoed three different proposals for the extension of the Mechanism, the last of which simply extended it for a short period and requested the Secretary-General to make recommendations, but even that was unacceptable.

Finally, on a note of agreement, I just want, like my Dutch colleague, to praise the incredible work of the White Helmets, who risk their own lives on a daily basis to save thousands of Syrians civilians.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My country condemns and rejects in the strongest possible terms any use of chemical weapons or of any other weapon of mass destruction, as this constitutes a crime against humanity and an unethical and unjustifiable act, under any circumstances. The real target of such weapons is the Syrian people, who remain the primary victims of the crimes committed by armed terrorist groups, which have not hesitated to use chemical weapons against them. I reaffirm before the Security Council that my country has sought, and continues to seek, to identify the real perpetrators responsible for the use of chemical weapons in my country, Syria.

Based on those steadfast principles, my Government joined the Chemical Weapons Convention and has honoured all of its commitments thereunder. My country achieved an unprecedented and definitive feat in the history of the Organization by ending the Syrian chemical-weapons programme in record time. That was corroborated in the report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism to the Council in June 2014.

My country is the party most desirous of uncovering the truth. We have always supported, and will continue to support, in principle any initiative by the Council whose aim is to establish the truth, identify those who are really trading in the blood of the Syrian people and using toxic chemical substances against Syrian civilians, including armed terrorist groups, as well as levelling false accusations against the Syrian Government.

In that regard, on behalf of the Government of my country, I once again reiterate our condemnation of all American and Western allegations accusing us of committing chemical-weapon attacks in our country. I reaffirm that those accusations are groundless and cheap lies. International public opinion and the majority of United Nations Members now know that this is but standard procedure for the United States and its allies in the Council each and every time they learn that the armed terrorist groups that they finance, arm and support on the ground in Syria are at an impasse and losing ground to the advancing Syrian army and its allies. The latter are today waging a war, on behalf of the entire world, against terrorism, which, unfortunately, is being supported by certain Governments that have no interest

in ensuring international peace and security and are solely seeking to advance their own political agendas.

My Government reaffirms once again that the United States, the United Kingdom and France are fully responsible for the paralysis of international investigative mechanisms concerning the use of toxic chemical substances, as the Governments of those States are seeking to shield the armed terrorist groups that they support. We recall before all present here that it is Syria that originally called for an investigation into instances of the use of toxic gas by armed terrorist groups.

False accusations against my Government of using toxic chemical substances are attempts to cover up its efforts to reveal to the world that certain armed terrorist groups and their sponsors have continued to perpetrate crimes against innocent civilians through the use, more than once, of toxic substances. The Syrian Government has provided the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) with evidence that proves that such groups possess banned toxic substances. We have repeatedly called for the carrying out of investigations to corroborate such evidence. However, our calls have been ignored.

All of my colleagues here recall that the United States and its allies destroyed the JIM. Through their practices here in the Council, they put an end to the Mechanism. They brought pressure to bear on its Chair and its members by pressuring them to refuse to visit Khan Shaykhun. Rather than conduct a field visit to collect real evidence, they merely sought to level accusations and offered up evidence trumped up by Western countries to undermine Syria, to support terrorist groups and to cover up their responsibility for this incident. That occurred after the United States and its partners rejected the call by the Russian Federation to stop the politicization of the work of the JIM and to rectify its methodology by refraining from using false evidence and, instead, limiting itself to scientific and legally sound and reasonable proof.

My country continues to honour all of its commitments — the ones we assumed when we joined the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction. We shall persevere in our fight against terrorism — a war that we will wage despite any political or media blackmail or any exploitation of the blood of innocent civilians in Syria. The Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic will today circulate a letter of the National Committee for the Implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, in response to the United States allegations vis-à-vis the work of the JIM and the Fact-finding Mission of the OPCW. The letter proves with scientific and legal evidence that the accusations against my country are false and that Syria has never used such chemicals, and will we ever use them, because we do not possess them. Let us recall that those who level such false accusations against Syria are the Governments of the same States with a dark history of using such internationally prohibited weapons against millions of innocent people — in Viet Nam, Cambodia, Algeria and the list goes on.

Finally, on behalf of my Government, I would like to extend our gratitude to the Russian Federation and to friendly countries in the Council, countries that seek to establish truth based on their awareness about the pernicious aims behind the false accusations. They have demonstrated their commitment to the supremacy of the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, as well as their conviction that such abnormal practices undermine the credibility of international actions and institutions and jeopardize international peace and security.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.